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**Exploring An African Civil Society: Development and Democracy in Malawi, 1994-2014** by CLIVE GABAY

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015. Pp. 123. £49.95 (hbk)

In *Exploring An African Civil Society* Clive Gabay lends further weight to the argument that liberal development, democracy and human rights reforms have frequently served the political and economic status quo in Sub-Saharan Africa. Gabay uses Malawi as a case study, suggesting that Malawian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) do not hold the Malawian state accountable to the country's impoverished majority, but to the international organisations that fund them. In the first chapter of the book Gabay introduces Foucault's theory of governmentality and its relevance to the study of civil society, before briefly summarising his methods and the structure of the book. In chapter two Gabay shows how a narrow, 'liberal' concept of civil society, rather than a more open-ended definition, came to predominate in World Bank reports and policy documents during the early 1990s. The chapter is a nice example of the kind of ideological cleavages that can exist within international organisations like the World Bank. Gabay goes on to argue in chapter three that the 'liberal' concept of civil society adopted by the World Bank is not in the interests of the 'people of Malawi' but that the staff of the CSOs he spent time with in Malawi 'perform' and 'embody' its precepts nonetheless. 'Performances' are conscious efforts to maintain the support of the Bank and other international organisations, on which Civil Society sector jobs depend. Embodied actions and discourses are, on the other hand, unconscious, Gabay treating them as evidence of the spread of a powerful liberal governmentality from international organisations like the

World Bank amongst Malawian CSOs. Gabay takes this argument about the connection of CSOs and international organisations into chapter four, explaining the activism of Malawian CSOs during the Presidencies of Bingu wa Mutharika and Joyce Banda as a function of their complicity with international organisations, rather than as an outworking of their identification with the concerns of the majority of Malawians. The structural relationships that Gabay sketches out through the book support his conclusion that Malawi's CSOs cannot act in the interests of Malawi's poor majority.

Questions remain though over the subjectivities Gabay ascribes to the staff of Malawian CSOs themselves. I would have found the argument that these men and women unconsciously 'embody' a powerful liberal hegemony or governmentality more convincing had Gabay been able to write more about the political ideas they expressed in the context of their churches, local bars or home villages. Whilst Gabay describes chapters three and four as being based on 'several years of ethnographic research' (p.17) they feature little ethnographic detail. Greater attention could also have been paid to political ideas from Malawi's *longue durée*, which are only alluded to in the book, and the extent to which they inform the discourse of the staff of Malawi's CSOs, relative to the new liberal governmentality Gabay describes.

Gabay's book is complemented in these respects by Harri Englund's 2006 ethnography *Prisoners of Freedom*, a book that draws similar conclusions about the implications of the structural position of Malawian CSOs for their work, whilst asking more questions of the subjectivities their employees. I would advise readers interested in this area to consult Englund's book alongside *Exploring An African Civil Society*.

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